Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Mycena interrupta Pixie's Parasol - photo Noel Young

Some reflections on journeys along the southern coast of New Guinea

The speaker at our May meeting was Jason Edwards, distinguished nature photographer based in Melbourne, who has worked for National Geographic Society all over the world. Jason spoke about his involvement on a recent ship-based expedition from the Coral Triangle region west of Indonesian New Guinea along the southern coast, through the Torres Strait to the eastern coast of Papua New Guinea.

I'm currently reading Nick Brodie's recent book "1787 – the lost chapters of Australia's beginnings" which starts with the epic journey from Peru in 1605 by three small Spanish ships led by Pedro de Quiro – a journey documented later by de Quiros's pilot, Don Diego de Prado in a precious manuscript stored securely in the State Library of NSW. After an unsuccessful attempt to establish a settlement on Espiritu Santo (now part of Vanuato) the ships separated, de Quiro eventually returning to Peru. De Prado had been transferred to the 40 ton *San Pedrico,* captained by Luis de Torres. They sailed south-west, and then (before reaching Australian shores) north-west, arriving on the southern coast of Papua New Guinea. They sought provisions and water, but many encounters with the peoples at settlements along the coast were hostile. The sailors saw cultivation of food by the New Guineans, and noted native fauna, including "many parrots, some very white with a crown on the head of yellow feathers". The shallow waters forced them away from the coast through what we now know as Torres Strait, past many islands. Passage through the treacherous shallow waters of the strait took 34 days, but eventually they came through to the Arafura sea. Continuing westward along the coast, the people were seen to differ from those back east – the ship had reached the "territory of the Papuans", a region known to Europeans through Portuguese and Dutch explorers and traders.

Jason's journey went from west to east. A slideshow of stunning photographs started with image of corals and their marine residents in the warm, shallow and very clear waters, home to the most diverse varieties of corals on Earth. So far these reefs have suffered little from climate change, perhaps because they have adapted to these warmer waters. Moving east, the expedition entered the marine sections of the World Heritage listed Lorentz National Park, the largest NP in SE Asia, stretching from the coast up to the high hinterland, including the enormous Asmat alluvial swamp. The expedition (including Jason's wife and 10 year old son – what an experience!) visited the town of Agats, east of the Park, where they saw the worrying impacts of recent droughts on the region and its people, and the potential for conflicts between neighbouring communities. The slide show continued with pauses for details of the journey – the natural wonders, the communities and people, and increasing signs of the impact of development. Past the Torres Strait, near Port Moresby and further to the eastern regions of PNG, the impacts of land clearing, drought and development became dramatic. While Torres and de Prado may not have seen much change along some of the coast of West Papua if they had been on the expedition with Jason, they would not have recognized these eastern areas.

Two expeditions, over four hundred years apart, observing and recording life along the southern coast of New Guinea. This note has not done justice to Jason's masterly presentation – full of information about this region just north of Australia, illustrated with amazing photographs, many of which will doubtless grace the pages of future editions of National Geographic. Until Torres and de Prado returned in their tiny ship from their epic journey just over four hundred years ago, New Guinea was shown on the maps of the day as the northern edge of the great southern land mass.

Peter Turner

SEANA Spring Camp:

The Ringwood Field Naturalists Club invites you to join them for the

SEANA Spring Camp in the Little Desert,
13th - 15th October 2017.

The camp will be based at the Little Desert Nature Lodge. Excursions will be held on Saturday 14th and Sunday 15th. Registration is due by 1st September. Those attending will be responsible for arranging their accommodation at the Little Desert Nature Lodge, or at Nhill or Kaniva.

Details and Registration form are available from CFNC Secretary.

Nature Notes - June (1941)

George Broadway

Before looking at the specimens sent in to Mr Crosbie Morrison, MSc, Editor of Wildlife, I noted that the magazine for that month included the first photographs of the Fly Agaric taken in Australia, at Emerald in Victoria. At that time there were only two records in Australia, the other being from Aldgate in S.A. How they have spread since, now commonly found in association with introduced Pine Trees. Another introduced fungus which seems to be prolific this year is the Saffron Milk Cap, *Lactarius deliciosus,* also to be found in association with pine trees. We have had several meals of this fungus this year.

Now the specimens sent for identification; I hope that these descriptions may help our readers with some identifications.

Geelong: Seeds of the Castor Oil Plant, *Ricinus.* Large attractive seeds. Fairly common in Mildura gardens

Prickly Moses, *Acacia verticillata*. A corruption of "Prickly Mimosa"

Flame Heath, *Astroloma conostephioides*, Common Correa, *Correa rubra*,

Queenscliff: Swan Plant, native of S. America. Also called "Wild Kapok". Food plant of Wanderer Butterfly

S. Melbourne: Saunders Case Moth. Woolly Bear larva of small moth. Both would attack your chrysanthemums. Arsenate of lead recommended

Kew: Caterpillars of Anthelidae moth, no common name

Pyramid: Looper caterpillar, rather battered. See June NL. 2016

Footscray: Woolly Bear caterpillar on Geraniums

Leongatha: Large Cossid Moth, about the size of a small mouse. Pupa case often seen projecting from ground after moth has emerged

Perenna: Silver Satin Moth. (I consulted John Landy on some of these moths. He suggested that this one might be *Thalaina clara.* The Clara Satin Moth – "Moths of Victoria" Vol. 5 p. 31)

Korong Vale: Caterpillar of Drinker Moth. (See Dec '16 NL). Has a pair of frightening "horns" and a purple gape

Collingwood: Chequered Blue Butterfly. Feeds on saltbushes

Rupanyup: Ribbed Case Moth, Also Elsternwick

Fairfield: Orchard Spider See July '16 NL Also Kyneton

Coburg: Book Scorpion. Often found among papers and books

Yarraville: "Red Spider" is actually a plant mite. Try a mixture of white oil and nicotine.

Richmond: Large centipede. Food is exclusively insects so not responsible for boring in house. Probably entered with firewood.

St. Kilda: Straight-line Spider. From habit of stretching its long legs fore and aft. Neither common name nor scientific name. (1941 remember)

S. Yarra: Black House Spider

Northcote: Slender-tailed Spider – builds community webs with little spindle-shaped egg sacs usually arranged in a line in the web

Bayswater: Banded Satin Spider. A Nephila spider. Harmless

Brighton: Black and white ringed millipede. All millipedes are vegetarians

Nth. Melb: Small scorpion

St. Kilda: Spider; Only common name known is “Liver Spider” on account of the colour. (Not in my spider books)

Blackburn: Melbourne Trapdoor. See July 16 NL

Flinders Naval Depot: Aphis Lion adults. Golden Lacewings. See June 16

Malvern: Aphis Lion Larvae

Port Melb: Saunders Case moth (again)

Moulamein: Largest of ground beetles or Carabs. *Hyperion schroetterii* Lives amongst rubbish on the ground clearing up decaying refuse or hunting the creatures that live there

Nth. Fitzroy: Cockchafer grubs in lawn

Caulfield: Carpet Beetle Larvae. July 16

Burwood: Ladybird Beetle larva. Beneficial because it feeds voraciously on aphis

Sunshine: Pear & Cherry Slug. Not a slug but the larva of a sawfly. Arsenate of lead recommended. (1941)

Geelong West: No, the baby kangaroo is not born in the pouch. (Of course we all know that now)

Sea Lake: Same question

Nullawil: Redwing Hawk Moth. (My chief suspect is *Hippotion scrofa*. The hindwing is rather reddish)

Camperdown: Cabbage white Butterfly. First recorded in Australia in 1937

Regent: Handsome moth, no common name. *Pterolocera amplicornis*

Mooroopna: Drinker or Snout Moth. See Dec ’16. Also Buffalo River

Maryborough: Large Hawk Moth

St. Kilda: Hawk Moth larva. The rear “horn” is not dangerous. Is probably used in digging in when about to pupate.

Portsea: Woolly Bear caterpillar of the Leopard Moth. May be a garden problem, try Derris Dust.

Williamstown: Leopard Moth larva. The adult moth has bands of yellow and black “livery” along the sides of the body, so is also known as the “Coachman Moth”.

Middle Park: Gum Emperor Moth. *Opodiphthera eucalypti.*

Maffra: Nettle-moth cocoon. The caterpillar hairs can penetrate the skin causing a painful rash like the sting of a nettle. The hairs also protrude through the walls of the cocoon acting as protection

Horsham: Mistletoe Butterfly. *Delias harpalyce.*

Dunolly: Large tick from Echidna. Most native animals have their tick parasites. Distinguished from lice by having 8 legs

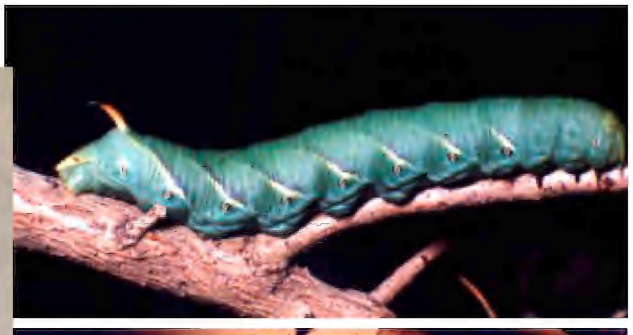
Shepparton: Grey Wolf Spider. See May NL

Footscray: Red-back spider see Sep ‘16NL

Anti-clockwise from left:

Lady Bird Larva
Ribbed Case Moth
Black House Spider - RSV
Helena Gum Moth. Larva
Hawk Moth. Larva

- George Broadway



Vale Tony Morton 02/05/1935 - 10/04/2017

Tony Morton was a member of our club and our local butterfly expert. His talks and articles were always amusing, as well as informative, and his enthusiasm for his subject was infectious. His last contribution to our newsletter gave a blow by blow description of his efforts to find a home for his wonderful butterfly collection and illustrated so well Tony's sense of humour and his positive outlook on life.

Tony initially came to Australia to teach at Melbourne Grammar for two years but he ended up teaching there for 30 or so years. He taught German and French, coached cricket, and also had a deep interest in music and drama. He was a multi-talented man.

Tony was a gentleman who always greeted you warmly and showed an interest in the natural world and club activities. He will be sadly missed.

- Geraldine Harris

Field Trip Eureka Reef, May 2017

Joy Weatherill

Sixteen enthusiastic members visited the Eureka Reef in Chewton for the field trip on 13th May - a perfect Autumn day. This area is part of the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park.

We were able to experience life as it would have been on an 1850's goldfield where a range of open cut quartz and alluvial gold was mined from the mid 1850's to the 1950's. We saw evidence of the open cut mine - a large scar where the quartz had been ripped from the hillside.

There are also deep vertical shafts remaining - the one in the carpark was covered by a large concrete slab.

Our circular walk of about a kilometre, took us over rocky hilly ground past examples of coppiced trees - now regrown with several trunks, and hand dug water races.

At three different points on the walk, there were the remains of batteries - the Eureka Consolidated Battery, Blights Battery and Harris Battery.

Instead of only using a vertical chimney, the miners built a Cornish chimney, which followed the slope up the hill. This extended upwards and underground for about 70 metres to the top of the hill where it ended in a vertical chimney - a clearly defined rounded section remains. It was built of handmade bricks. A fire heated water which created steam which drove the stamping batteries and crushed the quartz to extract the gold. One could only imagine the noise from machinery and all the activity - even the noise we were making meant that no birds were seen. Water races were used in the sluicing operation, to wash through layers of gravel to extract the gold.

We paused by the remains of the managers house, [photo right] the tramcar line, a spot where the cyanide tanks had been, (cyanide was used to extract gold from the tailings in the 1930's). According to one estimate, 40% of the gold still remained in the tailings.

We were also made aware that the gold diggers were not the first people to use this area - as our attention was drawn to a beautiful rock water well used by the indigenous Jaara people.

The list of native plants that were flowering is small - Sticky Everlasting, Spreading Wattle, Native Oxalis and, hooray, a couple of examples of Parsons' Bands.

There were also several beautiful examples of fungi and a very large Golden Orb Spider whose web spanned a distance of two or three metres. In all, a very good day.

Thank you to Richard for leading us.

Lesser Long-eared Bats

Geraldine Harris

I recently received a reply from Emmi van Harten with a positive identification of some bat photos I sent her after her wonderful talk in April. Both were identified as Lesser Long-eared Bats. Ours were photographed tucked under the timberwork at the top of our outer brick wall at Barkers Creek and the other one was found under plastic on top of a wardrobe being stored in a carport at the north end of Kalimna. Emmi sought confirmation from Australasian Bat Society. The consensus was that the characteristic Y shaved groove on the muzzle, in both instances, indicated a lesser long-eared bat.

Lesser Long-eared Bats are possibly the most wide ranging bats in Australia. They have adapted well to human presence and are found in a variety of rural and urban environments. They seek warm humid roosting conditions in all seasons. Bats depend on an abundance of insects, eating tonnes of insects nightly and the increasing use of chemical insecticides could affect the beneficial effects of these tiny mammals.

Roadside Cleanup in May

Thank you to Jeremy, Claire, Peter, Rosemary, Nigel, and Ron for their efforts with our latest roadside cleanup. We were pleased that the mid-week effort was just as successful and allowed for some new people to help out.

Despite a general feeling that there did not seem to be as much rubbish about this time, we still had a good ute load at the end of the morning. Items of interest noted during the exercise were a large stick nest with a felted central piece of warm soft materials that had fallen out of a tree, and some very healthy Salloop (*Einadia hastata*), Ruby Saltbush (*Enchylaena tomentosa*) with large red berries, Bluebells (*Wahlenbergia* sp) and Common New Holland Daisy (*Vittadinia cuneata*).

Geraldine and Geoff Harris

Bird-dropping Spider - *Celaenia excavata*

Joy Weatherill

A master of camouflage - its colour and pattern resembling a bird dropping so that no self-respecting bird would touch it.

When I first saw this one in my Point Lonsdale garden, it was sitting with its legs drawn up and was on one of the 23 egg cases. Each of the egg cases measured 10 to 12 millimetres in diameter.

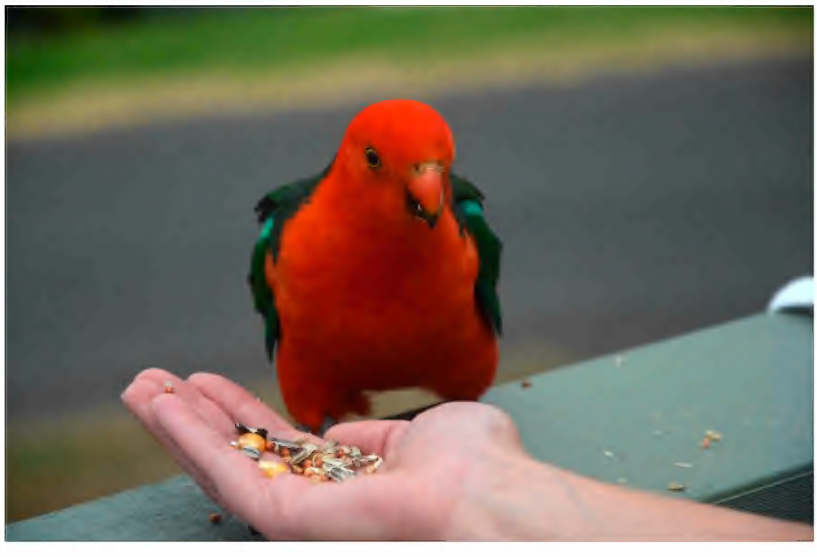
Over the next couple of weeks, the spider became gradually smaller in size and a more overall darker colour until it was about the size and colour of one of the egg sacs. It died, and all that was left was the exoskeleton - which finally blew away in the wind.

The egg cases were held together and attached to the branch of an olive tree, by fine web. This type of spider does not spin a web to trap prey, which consists almost exclusively of male moths. At night, the Bird-dropping Spider releases a chemical scent (pheromone) that mimics the airborne sex pheromone released by the female moths to attract their mates. Male moths are then caught by the strong front legs of the spider!

I found the Trapdoor Spider living beside the concrete drive, just outside my front door at Gisborne. I first noticed a perfectly formed hole with lid attached. I could see a pair of eyes gleaming at me from down the hole. I was obviously being watched, as the spider made a brave dart, and came partly out of the hole. When I looked again a while later, the door had been carefully closed, and its existence was now invisible.

Bird Quiz

The bird featured last month flew into our bedroom window early one morning and stunned itself, but remained upright. I managed to crawl up close to it to take this photograph before it flew away, apparently unhurt – perhaps just a nasty headache! It is, of course a **Sacred Kingfisher**, the most common Kingfisher (except the Kookaburra) in our region. We have seen it on several occasions on our property, but not in recent years. Its call is a quite diagnostic ek ek ek ek repeated often during the breeding season. Despite its name, it rarely feeds from water, preferably foraging on the land.



The bird for next month is shown at left, with no clues!

- Nigel

The ***Wild Plants of the Castlemaine District*** database

Ern Perkins' *Wild Plants of the Castlemaine District* database has been made available to anyone interested via USB memory sticks. The Club is working to load this invaluable resource onto the web, for easier access and wider distribution. Local experts Green Graphics will provide technical expertise and support. Once the system is up and running, we can set up processes for updating the data, through addition of photographs, information on plants not yet on the database, and correction of errors. For technical reasons, the current CFNC website, hosted on WordPress, is not suitable so a new website will be established.

The setup costs are expected to be around $400 - $500, and your Committee would welcome donations in support of this important project, which will make Ern Perkins' amazing resource widely and easily available, and ensure that the *Wild Plants of the Castlemaine District* will be maintained and updated over time, as Ern would have wished.

- Peter Turner

The committee welcomes two new volunteers to its ranks: Susan Albert and Dianne Thomson. Their offer of assistance is greatly appreciated.

Photo observations

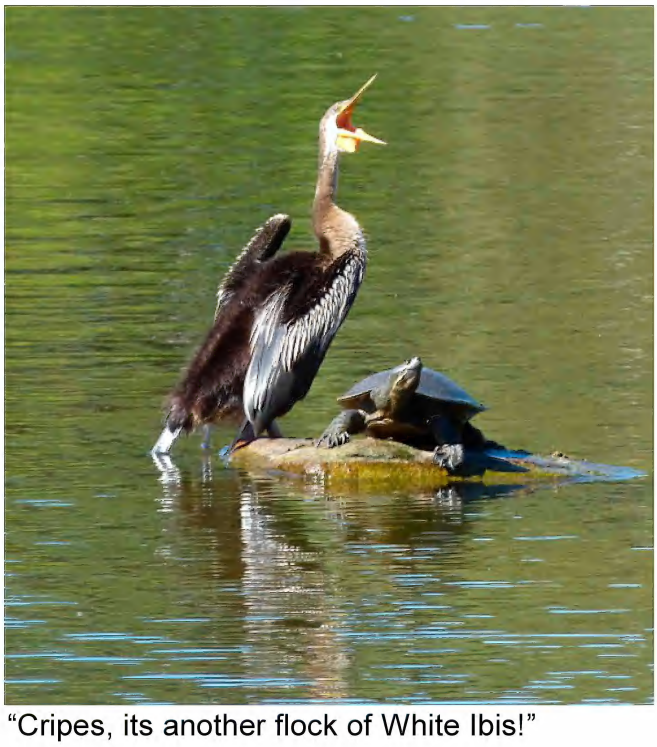
Peter Turner:

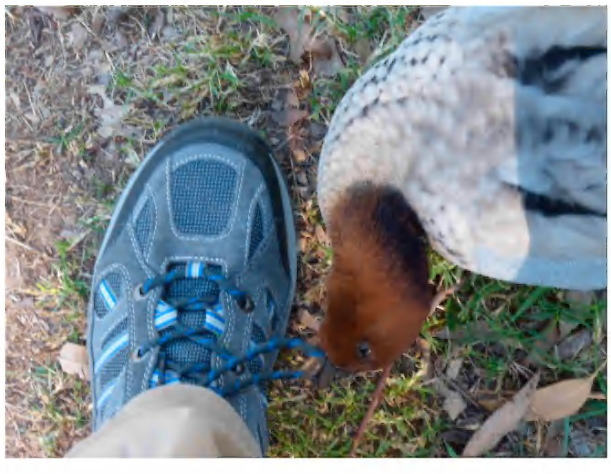
Three Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos in the Botanic Gardens this afternoon (26/5). After moving around in a pine tree, they flew to a high branch and proceeded to extract the nuts from the cones they had collected. Holding onto the branch with one claw, and to the cone with the other.

I had returned to the CBG to try for photos of the two Powerful Owls - mid-morning they had been sitting side by side high in their usual Stone Pine, clearly in view. But they had gone by about 2.30 - perhaps annoyed by the mowing being done below them.

Noel Young:

On my recent holiday in Brisbane, I managed to snap a few of the locals, including my first photo of a Jacana in the Gold Coast Botanical Gardens, a Wood duck with a shoe-lace fetish, and an odd couple sharing a rock in a lake.





"Cripes, its another flock of White Ibis!"

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri June 9 meeting: speaker George Broadway on Photo-point project

Sat June 10 field trip: examples of photo-points

Fri July 14 meeting: speaker Nigel Harland

Sat July 15 field trip: bird excursion to Quince Trees, Muckleford

Fri August 11 meeting: speaker Damian Cook (to be confirmed)

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2017
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2017 Committee

President:	George Broadway	5472 2513
Secretary:	Peter Turner	5470 6891
Treasurer:	Geoff Harris	

Nigel Harland	5474 8246	Richard Piesse	0448 572 867
Cheryl Taylor		Noel Young (Editor)	5472 1345

[email newsletter material to: **noel.young@optusnet.com.au**]

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.
Inc #A0003010B